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I believe it is fitting to begin with some history, in the interest of creating an atmosphere of comity rather than confrontation. As then Senator Paul Tsongas pointed out in an article at the time of President Suharto's State Visit to Washington in 1982, the United States Congress has long had a role in matters regarding Indonesia, and nowhere has this role been more important than during the final stages of the war of independence from the Netherlands in the late 1940s. Bipartisan efforts by a small group of US Senators ultimately helped bring about a change in official American policy by calling for a cutoff of Marshall Plan aid to the Dutch. As Senator Tsongas wrote, "There is little doubt that timely Senate moves shortened the war, saving many Indonesian lives and hastening formal Indonesian independence." Much good will was established between the US Congress and Indonesians during that crucial period, and helped to form bonds of friendship that exist until today. Indeed, in Congressional statements of concern over the East Timor issue, it has usually been stressed that the United States values its good relations with Indonesia.

In any event, US Congressional interest in Indonesian matters is nothing new. While one hesitates to draw parallels between different historical periods and events,

Congressional interest in the East Timor situation should not come as a surprise when one considers the history of such interest in Indonesian affairs and the involvement of Congress in international conflicts and human rights and humanitarian issues over the past 15 years and more. Moreover, in light of the history just outlined, this interest should not be interpreted as unfriendly.

Congressional activity on the East Timor tragedy dates back more than 15 years, to the period immediately following the December 1975 invasion when then-Rep. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) sponsored an unsuccessful amendment to reduce US military aid to Indonesia because of the invasion. In 1977, then-Rep. Donald Fraser (D-Minn.) began a series of four Congressional hearings that examined questions of Indonesian use of American-supplied military equipment in the East Timor conflict and a host of legal and human rights issues. State Department testimony at one of these hearings brought out the fact that "roughly 90 percent" of the arms available to the Indonesian armed forces at the time of the 1975 invasion of East Timor were of United States origin. High-ranking Indonesian officials confirmed this assessment.

Another four Congressional hearings were held on the Timor issue from 1979-82, and in 1989, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) devoted considerable time in the confirmation hearing of US Ambassador to Indonesia John Monjo to questions regarding East Timor. Last November, Rep. Tony Hall (D-Ohio), who has been

concerned about the Timor issue since his election to Congress 12 years ago, led a group of 223 House members -- a majority of that body -- who wrote to Secretary of State Baker raising a variety of human rights and humanitarian issues and calling for a just and peaceful settlement. Thus, there is a history of consistent effort in the Congress on this matter, though time prevents an exhaustive account of this record, which would fill many pages. Suffice it to say that the feeling exists in Congress that the Timor question is an issue, in the words of a headline in the Christian Science Monitor in 1980, that will not go away.

How best to summarize the basis of this concern? One must begin with the series of Congressional hearings in 1977-78 and the events that followed. At the hearings, Members of Congress were assured by various government representatives that whatever major human rights problems had taken place in East Timor, these problems were largely in the past -- that is, they had taken place in early 1976 for the most part. A Congressional delegation that was allowed to visit East Timor in May 1977 saw throngs of smiling people carrying signs praising then President Jimmy Carter and no visible traces of conflict -- a pattern that has been repeated over the years in various forms. There was, however, a cautionary note struck in at least one of the reports of the Congressional visitors, which noted that they had been unable to meet with specific individuals nor bring independent interpreters. John P. Salzberg, then on the staff of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations, stated that he had been

followed by Indonesian personnel wherever he went in East Timor. For these reasons, the validity of the May 1977 visit was questioned by Chairman Fraser, who continued to pursue the issue.

By the latter part of 1978, it was evident that earlier testimony in Congress and the aforementioned visit had presented a highly selective view of the realities of East Timor, as first-hand accounts of largescale starvation, attributable in good measure to Indonesian military action, emerged. But this was not the worst of it: by late 1979 independent authorities were stating openly that the Timor situation was worse than Biafra and potentially as serious as Cambodia. No less an authority than then-Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar added that the Timor situation might have been worse than that in Cambodia.

It was then, in 1979, that Rep. Hall, newly elected to Congress, became involved in Congressional efforts on the Timor issue, with special regard for the humanitarian emergency that existed at the time. Rep. Hall, it should be noted, is chairman of the House Select Committee on Hunger, a position which he has held since 1989. A key interest of Rep. Hall's is the use of food as a weapon in situations of armed conflict. I will not go into detail about the Timor situation as independent authorities saw it in 1979, but there were two elements that stood out: first, the scale of the humanitarian emergency, and second, shared American responsibility for this human tragedy, through weapons shipments and other means, as summarized by the commentator Morton Kondracke

in an influential article in the New Republic on Nov. 3, 1979.

A sense of responsibility to continue efforts to assist East Timor took hold during this period. Also during this period, an increasingly effective network of American secular and religious groups stepped up their efforts to inform the American public on various aspects of the Timor situation, efforts that continue through the present. As knowledge of the Timor issue has been spread by this network, through the media and organizations such as Amnesty International, Congressional support has steadily increased for humanitarian efforts, on human rights, and for a just and peaceful settlement of the ongoing conflict in East Timor. Rep. Hall believes that strong efforts should be made wherever possible to resolve armed conflict, and East Timor is obviously no exception.

In the earliest days of Congressional involvement on the Timor issue, there was a strong sense of the need to defend a small territory of scarcely more than 600,000 people from being swallowed by a nation with a population more than 200 times that number. The humanitarian emergency of 1978-80 gave compelling evidence of the need for continuing monitoring of the situation. And while responsible independent accounts indicate that the human rights and humanitarian concerns have changed since the darkest days of the mid- to late 1970s, there is little doubt that severe problems in these areas and others remain outstanding. As recently as April 7, 1991, an extensive article in the Sunday Observer of London made it clear that whatever talk there may be of improvements in the

situation, such evaluations are only relative. Many other independent investigators essentially have reached the same conclusion.

In 1977, when Rep. Fraser began his series of hearings on the East Timor situation, he also held hearings on the fate of other small and endangered nations. Doubtless these hearings appeared exotic and marginal to at least some observers at the time. Since then, however, the world has witnessed the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Argentine invasion of the Falklands and, most notably, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. One can easily draw distinctions between and among these various invasions and their consequences and the East Timor situation. Nonetheless, there have been comparisons made, in several cases between Kuwait and East Timor, such as in a New York Times editorial last December 7.

Comparisons have been made on numerous occasions with the other countries cited above, especially with regard to Cambodia. Taken together. these comparisons have helped draw attention to the case of East Timor, both in Congress and elsewhere.

One can argue about the validity of these comparisons. One can argue about differences that may exist. Certainly from the official Indonesian point of view, such comparisons are unfair, if not insulting. But to many well-placed observers in legislatures, the news media and a host of other respected institutions, the similarities are more troubling and important than the differences.

Add this fact to the long history of American as well as international interest and East Timor ends up with a special claim on Congressional attention.

It must be stressed that the US Congress is hardly alone in its concern over East Timor. Parliamentary groups throughout the world have been active on the question for some time. The European Parliament has issued a number of strong resolutions in recent years. The Japanese Diet has become increasingly committed in its work on East Timor. On another level, the European Economic Community presented a strong statement to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva on February 27.

In short, activities on the Timor issue are truly widespread: they are obviously not a peculiarity of the US Congress, and should be seen for what they are: an understandable reaction to a tragedy a large body of international opinion finds unacceptable.

What will come next for East Timor? The pace of change in international events in recent times makes speculation a rather hazardous pursuit. Nonetheless, there are signs of hope, as world trends have tended toward changes that not long ago seemed impossible. In the US Congress, one can safely predict that there will be growing activity on various aspects of the Timor issue. This is an important human rights question among a broad-based, bipartisan group on Capitol Hill, and there should be no misjudgement about the seriousness of this endeavor.

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East Timor and Indonesia
Some Implications.

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